

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

JULY 28, 2009

Ensuring Child Safety in the L.A. County Child Welfare System

On Thursday, July 23, 2009, police officers were called to a residence on East 87th Place in South Los Angeles, where they found the body of six-year old Dae'von Bailey. The autopsy report is pending. The Director of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has opened an investigation and is reviewing the circumstances involving Dae'von's death, as well as all prior contacts made to DCFS regarding the child.

The County of Los Angeles (L.A. County) is responsible for the well-being and safety of the children in the care of DCFS. DCFS child fatality reports indicate that in the last year, over a dozen children died after allegations of abuse. In the 2nd Supervisorial District, there has been a disproportionate number of deaths involving children with cases in the DCFS system.

There is a critical and immediate need to address and ameliorate this situation. Recommended steps include the effort to: 1) identify any breakdown or deficiency in existing policies, 2) review investigative and/or review processes, such as, the Structured Decision-Making tool used by social workers, 3) collect, analyze and share

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MOLINA _____

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data through the systems in place, such as, the Family and Children Index (FCI), and 4) implement measures to reduce the risk to children.

In response to a Board motion approved on April 28, 2009, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) issued a report about the quality and availability of services for at-risk children and families, and the training standards for children's social workers. Some of what still remains to be examined is the case load ratio and assignment processes for social workers at each level to ensure that children are adequately served and their cases given the full and necessary attention.

In addition, the County is conducting a search for the Lead Attorney in the Children's Special Investigations Unit (CSIU), who will be charged with providing the Board with an independent legal review of children's deaths and serious incidents of child abuse or neglect. Candidates are currently being interviewed, and it is imperative that we place a high priority on filling this position and move forward as soon as possible.

THEREFORE, I MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Direct the Chief Executive Officer to:

1. Work with the Acting Director of Personnel and report back to the Board of Supervisors at its meeting on August 11, 2009 on the status of hiring the lead attorney for the Children's Special Investigations Unit (CSIU), and to include a timetable in the report with an emphasis on filling this position as soon as possible;

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2. Work with the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services and report back to the Board of Supervisors at its meeting on August 18, 2009 with a review and evaluation of: 1) the efficacy and utilization of the Structured Decision-Making tool (SDM) used by social workers in predicting the likelihood of child abuse, and 2) the existing caseload ratio for each level of children's social worker, to include a comparison with surrounding counties and best practices, including recommendations for an optimum staffing ratio and case assignment process; and

3. Work with the Auditor-Controller and the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to: 1) gather the demographics of all children in the DCFS system and their fatalities (homicide or accidental) for the past three years, and 2) identify any underlying trends or issues, and 3) analyze those trends and issues to determine how they may contribute to deficiencies in existing policies as they relate to the identifying, assigning, reporting, and monitoring of cases, and report back to the Board of Supervisors at its meeting on September 29, 2009.

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